

Layers of History at Fort Frederick





Military Occupation

- ◆ French and Indian War 1756 – 1759
 - Protect backcountry inhabitants
 - Base for offensive operations against French
- ◆ American War of Independence
 - Adapted for use as prison camp
 - Housed British prisoners from Saratoga and Yorktown
- ◆ Civil War
 - Union troops in and around fort intermittently



Agricultural Use

- ◆ Fort sold at public auction in 1791
 - Period of extensive agricultural use begins
 - Military features begin to disappear
- ◆ Nathan Williams acquires property in 1860
 - Family maintains ownership until early 20th Century
 - Dismantle some of the wall of original fort to construct a barn



Development of a State Park

- ◆ Interest in preserving fort builds in 1880's
- ◆ State of Maryland reacquires fort and surrounding property in 1922
- ◆ Civilian Conservation Corps reconstructs walls and conducts extensive archaeological investigations
- ◆ Two enlisted men's barracks reconstructed in 1975
- ◆ Research continues with the goal of returning the fort to 1750's appearance



The Challenge of Interpretation

- ◆ A disproportionate amount of time has been spent discussing the original appearance of the fort as compared to events that took place there
 - Detrimental effect on factual interpretation
- ◆ This focus has led to speculation that is not based on documentary evidence
 - The insistence that certain features “had to be there, because all forts had them”



The Fort Frederick Anomaly

The relative importance of the fort

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The amount of available documentation about
the fort



Indicators of Fort Frederick's Importance

- ◆ Governor Sharpe wanted the fort to be a cornerstone of British military power
- ◆ Elaborate construction
 - Walls built of stone
 - Unusually large, encompassing approximately 2.5 acres
 - Barracks are frame rather than typical log construction
- ◆ The fort was very expensive and extremely time consuming to build



Dearth of Documentation

- ◆ No extant maps or plans for the fort
- ◆ Primary documentation provides scant descriptions of the fort
- ◆ Archaeological investigations have yielded little positive evidence of additional features



What We Know

- ◆ Colonial Assembly made initial allocation of funds in May 1756
- ◆ Construction began about June 1756
- ◆ Governor Sharpe returned to Assembly for additional funds, which were granted
- ◆ In December 1757, Sharpe's second request for additional funds is denied



The Debate

- ◆ What was the original intent for the design of the fort?
- ◆ What did the fort look like when work ceased in late 1757?
- ◆ In short, *was the fort ever completed?*



The Challenge

- ◆ Take a “nontraditional” look at the physical features of the fort
 - Were there wooden catwalks or earth ramparts to defend the walls? Did they cover all or part of the wall? Considering the financial situation, were wall defenses ever constructed?



The Challenge

- ◆ Consider that the garrison of Fort Frederick made adaptive uses of structures to meet their needs
 - Does mention of a guardhouse necessarily indicate a specialized structure?
 - Must a fort have a subterranean powder magazine?



The Solution

- ◆ Consider Fort Frederick within the framework of what is known through the historical record and what is supported by archaeology
- ◆ Build an interpretive program that emphasizes important events and not the physical features of Fort Frederick
- ◆ Continue to search for additional primary sources